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THE STORY OF CHRIST IN THE WRITINGS OF IGNATIUS

1. Introduction

To state the obvious, Ignatius of Antioch was not a gospel writer. Or to put the point another way, his purpose was not that of presenting his readers with a narrative account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The genre of the New Testament gospels has most typically been understood as that of the *bios*, that is seeing them as ancient ‘lives of Christ’.¹ Ignatius’ writings are epistles: not literary conceits that mimic the epistolary genre for the purpose of presenting some theological disquisition, but genuine letters sent from a writer to an audience removed by some distance. The reasons Ignatius had for writing to communities he had visited, or was yet to visit, are complex and varied. There are personal reasons behind the writing of these letters, since Ignatius wished to communicate details about his present circumstances, his attitude towards his impending death in Rome, and even to convince believers in Rome not to attempt to intervene on his behalf. There are, however, far more wide ranging reasons behind the composition of these letters that relate to pressing issues in the nascent churches especially in Asia Minor. Thus the letters present a mix of pastoral, pedagogical, and polemical purposes, as Ignatius argues that the recipients should accept and adopt the theological understandings he presents in his own writings.

The circumstances under which Ignatius wrote his occasional letters needs to be considered and described, in order to appreciate the resources he may or may not have had at his disposal. Ignatius describes himself as ‘chained amidst ten leopards (that is, a company of soldiers) who only get worse when they are well treated’ (Ign. *Rom.* 5.1). Given these circumstances it is highly unlikely that Ignatius had access to textual resources to consult as references in the composition of his letters. He may have been familiar with various early Christian writings, but it appears most probable that during his transportation to Rome he would have had to rely on his memory to recall the contents of those texts. It is also important to bear in mind that not only were these letters probably composed in a relatively short period of time – perhaps a span of a few weeks, but that this period must have been a time of immense emotional and spiritual challenge. Thus, as Holmes has judged, the literary repository of the letters of Ignatius are ‘of extraordinary interest because of the unparalleled light they shed on the history of the church at the time, and because of what they reveal about the remarkable personality of the author.’² Yet, the letters do not only reveal the author’s personality and information about the church, they also give important insights into key traditions early Christian communities drew upon as the basis for their identity and faith commitments. Here, the question concerns the extent of Ignatius’ knowledge of the story of Jesus.

¹ The work of Richard Burridge has perhaps been most significant in establishing a general consensus that the canonical gospels in terms of genre most closely align with ancient Greek and Roman biographies. In conclusion Burridge states, ‘The genre of βίος is flexible and diverse, with variation in the pattern of features from one βίος to another. The gospels also diverge from the pattern in some aspects, but not to any greater degree than other βίοι; in other words, they have at least as much in common with Graeco-Roman βίοι, as the βίοι have with each other. Therefore, the gospels must belong to the genre of βίος. R.A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004 [orig.; Cambridge: CUP, 1992]) 250.

² Michael W. Holmes, (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 166.

2. Methodological Considerations

The issue of who knew what and when seems to come up again and again in political enquiries and commissions. Typically these questions are asked to establish the complicity or blamelessness of a high profile figure in relation to activities or decisions that are dubious, immoral, or illegal. While Ignatius of Antioch is one of the high profile figures of the early Christian movement in the first half of the second century,³ asking about what he knew of the Christ story is not attached to judgments about dubiety or morality. Rather, it is part of the academic interest in ascertaining when details of the Jesus story can be assumed to be in wide circulation among believers, and when it is possible to take for granted that a gospel type account was a common repository of tradition for the early church.

Yet herein an important distinction needs to be emphasized between what can be established in regard to the knowledge of an early Christian figure, and what can no longer be recovered. Presumably Ignatius knew many things to which he did not make reference in his seven widely accepted authentic letters. However, this apparent certainty does not legitimate inferences from silence. That is not only because such inferred assumptions cannot be verified, but because more significantly by limiting the enquiry to the explicit statements contained in those seven letters it is possible to better appreciate the theological locus of the arguments that Ignatius puts forward. Consequently, the statements contained in the seven letters penned during a short period of intense personal and theological reflection provide deep insight into the rich thought of an individual Christian leader, and also into the shared repository of traditions that could drawn upon in these acts of epistolary communication.

The method adopted here will consist of two stages. First it will comprise a textual deductive investigation whereby each letter is treated separately to establish reference of the Christ story in the individual letters and how such usages of tradition form the overall argument in each case. Second, in conclusion this study will engage on a thematic synthesis where recurrent ideas are identified and their role in Ignatius' larger theological understanding is discussed.

3. The Christ Story in the Individual Letter's of Ignatius

While there is much that unifies the seven genuine letters of Ignatius, such as their emphasis on the authority of the episcopal figure and the backdrop of Ignatius' own impending martyrdom, there are significant and key differences. For instance while six are corporate in that they are addressed to groups, one is individual (at least ostensibly) addressed to Polycarp bishop of Smyrna. Similarly, six are addressed to groups or an individual with whom Ignatius has had contact. By contrast, the letter addressed to the Romans is sent to a community Ignatius is yet to meet, although that meeting will occur in his near future. There are also differences in the themes covered and the issues that Ignatius feels he must tackle. At times the emphasis falls upon a defective Christology that appears to deny the reality of Christ's bodily enfleshment and his suffering. At other times the concern is with some type of Judaizing tendency, which again is seen as debasing Christian teaching as Ignatius understands it. For this

³ Apart from Ignatius of Antioch, the only other Christian leader for whom there survives extended information is his younger fellow bishop and friend Polycarp of Smyrna. In comparison with Ignatius, 'What is known of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, is not drawn from a highly compressed period, but emerges from a range of sources and his career spans several decades of the second century.' See P. Foster, 'Polycarp in the Writings of Ignatius', in D.M. Gurtner, J. Hernandez Jr., and P. Foster (eds), *Studies on the Text of the New Testament and Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Michael W. Holmes*, NTTSD 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

reason, there is significant value in treating the letters separately in order to assess how Ignatius deploys aspects of the Jesus story when addressing these separate communities or individuals.

3.1 *The Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians*

Ignatius' *Letter to the Ephesians* is his longest piece of correspondence. From the details at the end of the letter it was not a location he passed through during his journey to Rome. Rather, a delegation had been sent from Ephesus to meet Ignatius while he was in Smyrna. Thus he writes to the Ephesian believers, 'I am devoted to you and to those whom for the honour of God you sent to Smyrna, from where I am writing' (Ign. *Eph.* 21.1; cf. 1.2-3). In this letter Ignatius reveals a number of specific issues that he sees as confronting the church in Ephesus.⁴ Among these are the need for obedience to the bishop and elders (Ign. *Eph.* 4.1-6.2), and a strong warning against accepting the teachings of those to do not affirm the reality of Christ's humanity (Ign. *Eph.* 7.1-8.2; 16.1-19.3). Both of these concerns and Ignatius' response to them is undergirded by an appeal to various details presented concerning the life of Jesus.

In this letter Ignatius makes various references to Christ. In the opening section he refers to 'Christ Jesus our Saviour' (Ign. *Eph.* 1.1). Within the canonical gospels it is rare to find references to Jesus as σωτήρ, 'saviour'. The most obvious occurs when the angel of the Lord announces to the shepherds the birth of 'a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (Lk 2.11). Ignatius' use of this title appears to be part of his theological language, in much the same way as it is used in the Pauline epistles (Phil 3.20), and does not reveal any dependence of the story of Jesus as contained in the Lukan birth account. Schoedel expresses a similar opinion when he writes, 'Ignatius' reference to Christ as "Savior" here (and in *Mag. Inscr.*; *Phd.* 9.2; *Sm.* 7.1) is already formulaic.'⁵ Ignatius praises the Ephesian believers for sending their bishop Onesimus to meet him in Smyrna. In writing to the congregation, Ignatius exhorts them concerning Onesimus in the following terms: 'I pray that you will love him in accordance with the standard set by Jesus Christ' (Ign. *Eph.* 1.3). Again, it is unlikely that any specific aspect of the Jesus tradition, such as Jn 13.34-35 or 15.9, is being evoked as the basis for this sentiment. Lightfoot glossed this phrase in the following manner, 'i.e. "with a Christian love"; comp. Rom. xv. 5.'⁶ While the parallel adduced with Rom 15.5 is thematically similar, it is not the basis for this statement in Ignatius' letter, and it simply illustrates that Lightfoot saw the injunction to love Onesimus as part of wider Christian rhetoric. Similarly the command 'to glorify Jesus Christ' (Ign. *Eph.* 2.2) is unlikely to be related to the 'glory' language of the fourth gospel (Jn 17.10), since in this context it is the Ephesians who are to glorify Christ and not the Father giving glory as in John's account.

In contrast to the negative results of those first few examples, which are formulaic expressions or generalised instructions offered in the name of Christ, Ignatius employs two creed-like statements when writing to the believers in Ephesus.⁷ In fact these quasi-credal statements represent two out of a total of five such statements

⁴ For a summary of the major themes in *Ephesians* see H. Löhr, 'The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch', in W. Pratscher (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Waco: Baylor, 2010) 91-115, here 98.

⁵ W.R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 41 n.9.

⁶ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, (London: Macmillan, 1889) vol. 2, 33.

⁷ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 85.

scattered throughout his seven genuine letters.⁸ It is helpful to present the texts of these two statements together, because although there are significant differences, there is overlap in terms of the affirmations these two statements make. Thus they provide rich insight into some of the key elements that can demonstrably be shown to form part of the story of Jesus known by Ignatius.

εἷς ἰατρός ἐστιν σαρκικός τε καὶ πνευματικός γεννητὸς καὶ ἀγέννητος ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ θεὸς ἐν θανάτῳ ζωὴ ἀληθινή καὶ ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ πρῶτον παθητὸς καὶ τότε ἀπαθὴς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν.

There is only one physician, who is both of flesh and spirit, both born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God; first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2)

ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκυοφορήθη ὑπὸ Μαρίας κατ' οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος μὲν Δαυεὶδ πνεύματος δὲ ἁγίου ὃς ἐγεννήθη καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη ἵνα τῷ πάθει τὸ ὕδωρ καθάρσῃ.

For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God's plan, both from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptized in order that by his suffering he may cleanse the water. (Ign. *Eph.* 18.2)

Together these statements affirm the belief that Jesus was a Davidic descendant, both speak in various ways of Jesus' conception and birth by Mary, only the second demonstrates knowledge of Jesus' baptism in water, the two statements focus on the suffering of Jesus – although only the first explicitly mentions the death of Jesus, and there is an allusion to the resurrection of Christ in the first statement in the statement 'first subject to suffering and then beyond it' (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2). However, the purpose of these two statements is not a historical concern to provide a skeletal outline of the life of Jesus: that is presented only incidentally. Instead, these statements function to rebut the teachings of Ignatius' adversaries. Löhr sees these selective catalogues of events from the life of Jesus as part of the larger 'anti-docetic christology' that Ignatius strenuously presents on numerous occasions throughout his letters. From this perspective Löhr writes that,

Ignatius time and again brings up the full incarnation up to the suffering, death, and bodily resurrection ... In this perspective the Son of God and is also the Son of David (IgnEph 18.2, 20.2) and of Mary (IgnEph 7.2, 18.2, 19.1; IgnTrall 9.1). The consequently conceived unity of Father and Son allows one to speak of the blood, flesh, and sufferings of God (IgnEph 1.1, 7.2; IgnRom 6.3; IgnPol 3.2).⁹

Therefore, while these quasi-credal statements allow one to glean some understanding of the Jesus story as known to Ignatius, it needs to be recognised that the contents of the theological affirmations is highly selective. The elements chosen from the received stories of Jesus are those which allow Ignatius to advance his own christological perspectives, while refuting those of his opponents.

There are other statements in the *Letter to the Ephesians* that resonate with material from the canonical gospels. After declaring that 'no-one who makes a profession of faith sins' – a statement that in broad terms recollects the idea in 1 Jn 3.4-6) – Ignatius supports his statement with the maxim, 'the tree is made manifest by its fruit' (Ign. *Eph.* 14.2). No source is given for this maxim, but it clearly resonates with various statements in the gospel tradition (Matt 7.17-18 12.33//Lk 6.43-44). However, the correspondence is not exact, and Ignatius does not present this as dominical teaching. This saying may have become a free-floating piece of tradition,

⁸ The five semi-credal statements are Ign. *Eph.* 7.2; 18.2; Ign. *Mag.* 11.1; Ign. *Trall.* 9.1-2; Ign. *Smyr.* 1.1-2. See for instance C.N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker 2012) 55.

⁹ Löhr, 'The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch', 110.

that was cited for its generalised sentiment, rather than because the author recognised it as a dominical warrant.¹⁰ In another example that betrays knowledge of a core element of the Jesus story, Ignatius castigates those who corrupt the faith of those ‘for whom Jesus Christ was crucified’ (Ign. *Eph.* 16.2). This generalised reference to the crucifixion cannot be linked with any specific gospel, and although not espousing any specific theory of atonement Ignatius views Christ’s death as being on behalf of those who have faith in God. This may reflect some Pauline ideas about the crucifixion (cf. 1 Cor 1.13, 18, 23; 2 Cor 13.4), but even here the links are not particularly strong. More promising is the recollection that ‘the Lord accepted ointment on his head’ (Ign. *Eph.* 17.1). The anointing of Jesus by a woman is recorded in all four canonical gospels. However, in the Lukan and Johannine accounts the woman anoints the feet of Jesus (Lk 7.37-39; Jn 12.18). By contrast, only in Matthew and Mark is the perfume poured over Jesus’ head (Mk 14.3; Matt 26.7).¹¹ Given Ignatius’ dependence on Matthew elsewhere in his epistles, it may be more plausible to entertain the possibility that this piece of tradition is derived from Matthew and not Mark. However, it is important to acknowledge that certainty is not possible since the verbal parallels are too slight and the incident has been compressed using different language. Moreover, whereas Matthew and Mark have Jesus declaring that the anointing was a proleptic act of embalming his body, ‘she did it to prepare me for burial’ (Matt 26.12), the story takes on an altogether different meaning for Ignatius. He loads the incident with metaphorical significance, stating the Jesus received the anointing so ‘that he might breathe incorruptibility upon the church. Do not be anointed with the stench of the teaching of the ruler of this age’ (Ign. *Eph.* 17.1). It is not possible to determine whether the Pauline image of two aromas, one of death and one of life (2 Cor 2.14-16), informs this metaphorical interpretation at any level. For as Schoedel points out, the image is widespread in various forms, with a range of loosely related parallels (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.4.1; *Gos. Truth* 33,39-34,34; *Gos. Phil.* 77,35-78,12).¹²

The final example in this letter concerns Ignatius’ use of the title ‘Son of Man’, which he uses in one of his typical double affirmations where he holds two apparently paradoxically statements together, ‘one Jesus Christ ... who is Son of Man and Son of God’ (Ign. *Eph.* 20.2). What is striking is that although the title Son of Man is commonplace in the gospels, it did not enjoy wide currency beyond them,¹³ apart from where the gospels are being cited, or there is reflection either on Dan 7.13 or 1 *Enoch* 46; 71.14. Given the ubiquitous nature of this title in the four canonical gospels it is not possible to trace it to any particular occurrence. Notwithstanding this, Ignatius demonstrates knowledge of this prominent title from the gospels. However, he juxtaposes the two titles ‘Son of Man’ and ‘Son of God’ to serve his theological agenda, with Son of Man indicating the humanity of Christ. Yet as Schoedel observe, for Ignatius there is a alteration in meaning ‘linked with the shift from eschatological to incarnational categories ... Thus the expression “son of humanity and son of God” represents an alternative formulation of the christological paradox.’¹⁴

¹⁰ Lightfoot cites the gospel parallels without comment, Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 2, 68. Schoedel notes this as ‘a proverbial saying close to Matt 12:33 (Lk 6.44)’, without further comment. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 76.

¹¹ France posits ‘two originally separate stories of a woman anointing Jesus.’ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007) 973. Though the accounts are divergent it may be better to see them as originating from a single tradition.

¹² Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 81.

¹³ It is often noted that the title is absent in the Pauline letters.

¹⁴ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 97.

Therefore, in his *Letter to the Ephesians*, Ignatius demonstrates some knowledge of the Jesus story. Perhaps the closest he comes to a type of narrative framework is with the two brief quasi-credal statements in the letter (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2; 18.2). Yet even here the staccato sequence of events is hardly comparable to the type of narratives that occur in the canonical gospels. Yet, what these brief statements suggest is that what permitted Ignatius to present such compressed summaries was both his wider knowledge of the stories that undergirded these affirmations and the expectation that the recipients of the letter would have sufficient pre-knowledge to understand the events to which he was alluding. Admittedly this is a very general argument, and it is impossible to speak definitively concerning exactly what Ignatius knew apart from the explicit references in his letters. However, there is reason to suspect that his knowledge of the Jesus' story was not simply confined to those brief details that he reproduced in his writings.

3.2 *The Letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians*

Ignatius' appears to confront a different problem in his *Letter to the Magnesians*, namely, that of persuading his readers not 'to adopt Jewish practices as part of their faith or to return to the traditions of Judaism.'¹⁵ Thus his statements about Jesus are made in the context of a call to adhere to the authority of Bishop Demas (Ign. *Mag.* 3.1-4.1), and warnings not to adopt Jewish practices (Ign. *Mag.* 8.1-10.3).¹⁶

The first reference to Jesus occurs in the opening greeting, where Ignatius describes him as 'Christ Jesus our Saviour' (Ign. *salut.*). In the canonical gospels only in Luke's birth narrative is the term 'saviour' used when the angel of the Lord informs the shepherds that 'today ... has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (Lk 2.11). However, given the lack of any reference to the birth of Jesus in the greeting to the Magnesians, it appears unlikely that Ignatius is dependent on Luke for this appellation. Rather it is more plausible that the reference to Jesus as saviour reflects typical Christian language for expressing christological beliefs towards the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century. This is borne out by the heightened use of the term in Pastoral Epistles to describe Jesus (2 Tim 1.10; Tit 1.4; 2.13; 3.6).¹⁷ Therefore, in line with usage in the Pastoral Epistles, Ignatius seems to be using a contemporary Christian linguistic designation, and not referencing gospel tradition.

The next references to Jesus also appear to be formulated without reference to a particular aspect of the Jesus story, but instead they stem from theological reflection on the significance of Christ. The reference to 'the faith of Jesus Christ' (Ign. *Mag.* 1.2) might cast light on a continuing debate in Pauline scholarship, but it says little about the form of the Jesus story known to Ignatius. The expression 'the law of Jesus Christ' (Ign. *Mag.* 2.1) is even more intriguing. Schoedel argues the combination of 'grace' with 'law' 'may be taken to refer to the totality of divine revelation – not, however, the two testaments (cf. John 1:17; Heb 10.28).'¹⁸ Therefore any connection with the language of the Johannine prologue is to be rejected. Injunctions to love one another in Jesus Christ (Ign. *Mag.* 5.2; 6.2) form the theological rationale for Ignatius' communitarian ethics of inner-group love. There is a possibility that this perspective

¹⁵ Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 51.

¹⁶ See Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 108-111, 118-127.

¹⁷ Mounce notes in regard to Tit 1.4 that 'the unique phrase "Christ Jesus our Saviour" ... has no exact counterpart elsewhere in Paul.' W.D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Nelson, 2000) 382.

¹⁸ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 107.

ultimately derives from the love commands in the fourth gospel. If that is the case, Ignatius' injunction to love one another has become so detached from any possible original context that it is not longer possible to account for the origin of this thought. It is more likely that the affirmation that God 'revealed himself through Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Word, which proceeded from silence, who in every way pleased him who sent him' (Ign. *Mag.* 8.2) reflects a pastiche of theological motifs derived primarily from the fourth gospel. However, against that suggestion, one needs to account for the widespread use of the idea of Jesus as 'the word' in various strands of second century Christian thought, especially among gnostic writers and those who oppose their thought system (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.1.1; 2.12.2; *Gos. Egy.* 3,2; 4,2; *Gos. Truth* 37,10-11; *Trim. Prot.* 42,4-5; 46, 11-14). Hence it may be best to view this reference to Jesus as the 'word', as being indirectly indebted to Johannine thought.

In a similar way as occurred in *Ephesians*, in writing to the Magnesians Ignatius presents a semi-credal statement that appears to present a summary of key events from the life of Jesus. Ignatius writes:

ἀλλὰ πεπληροφορηθῆσθαι ἐν τῇ γεννήσει καὶ τῷ πάθει καὶ τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ γενομένῃ ἐν καιρῷ τῆς ἡγεμονίας Ποντίου Πιλάτου πραχθέντα ἀληθῶς καὶ βεβαίως ὑπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

but instead to be fully convinced about the birth, and the suffering, and the resurrection that took place during the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate. These things were truly and most assuredly done by Jesus Christ. (Ign. *Mag.* 11.1)

This is the clearest instance of a Jesus story being communicated in the letter. The events recollected are the birth, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. The chronological reference to the events taking place in the time of Pontius Pilate presumably refers only to the suffering and death, and not to the birth of Jesus. Yet rather than providing historical detail the reference to Pilate was intended 'to underscore the reality of the passion in the face of docetic doctrine.'¹⁹

In this letter, like *Ephesians*, Ignatius does not reveal many details concerning the story of Jesus, at least not in narrative form. Again, however, there appears to be background information assumed on the part of the recipients of the letter. They are expected to be able to unpack references to Christ's birth, suffering, and death, without Ignatius having to present the details of these events. Consequently, it is not possible to determine what knowledge or form of tradition Ignatius knew himself, or expected his audience to possess.

3.3 *The Letter of Ignatius to the Trallians*

In the *Letter to the Trallians*, Ignatius' focus is directed towards two concerns: first that of church structure and authority of leadership (Ign. *Trall.* 2.1-5.2), then addressing the threat Ignatius perceives from those teaching a docetic form of christology (Ign. *Trall.* 6.1-11.2).²⁰

In this letter Ignatius refers to fewer traditions that could potentially derive from knowledge of the Jesus story. However, he does again provide one important credal statement that appears to presuppose a wider knowledge of events from the life of Christ than is expressed in the very compressed form in which it is presented. While discussing the need for obedience to Polybius their bishop, Ignatius takes as exemplary the obedience of 'Jesus Christ, who died for us' (Ign. *Trall.* 2.1). Here, Ignatius' reference to the death of Christ permits him to reflect theologically on the significance of that event. He informs the Trallians through 'believing in his death'

¹⁹ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 129.

²⁰ Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 59.

they themselves ‘escape death’ (Ign. *Trall.* 2.1). The progression of Ignatius’ thought between obeying the bishop and escape from death is not entirely obvious.²¹ However, there is little doubt that his reference to Christ’s death is a compressed way of reference to the obedience of Jesus. It is possible that the Gethsemane scene (cf. Matt 26.36-46) is in Ignatius’ mind at this point, but any degree of certainty on that point is not possible due to the lack of textual reference or shared terminology.

Next in warning the Trallians of the dangers of false teaching, Ignatius urges them to resist such instruction on the basis of ‘the love of Jesus Christ’ (Ign. *Trall.* 6.1). As was the case elsewhere in Ignatius’ writings (Ign. *Eph.* 1.3; *Mag.* 5.2; 6.2) it is possible that the Johannine injunctions (cf. Jn 15.9) stand at some remove behind this statement. However, if that were the case, then it would appear that Ignatius does not demonstrate an awareness of such a link. The theme of ‘love’ recurs when Ignatius makes the somewhat unusual equation regarding the need to be strong ‘in faith (which is the flesh of the Lord) and in love (which is the blood of Jesus Christ)’ (Ign. *Trall.* 8.1). Here there is a concatenation of imagery, with eucharistic and paschal ideas merging in the call to remain steadfast in the Christian virtues of faith and love.²²

The most complete description of events that relate to a wider sweep of the life of Jesus is once again found in a compressed credal statement. In the context Ignatius connects the following events.

Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ λαλῇ τις τοῦ ἐκ γένους Δαυεὶδ τοῦ ἐκ Μαρίας ὃς ἀληθῶς ἐγεννήθη ἔφαγόν τε καὶ ἔπιεν ἀληθῶς ἐδιώχθη ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου ἀληθῶς ἐσταυρώθη καὶ ἀπέθανεν βλέπόντων τῶν ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ ὑποχθονίων ὃς καὶ ἀληθῶς ἠγέρθη ἀπὸ νεκρῶν

Jesus Christ, who was from the family David, who was the son of Mary; who really was born, who both ate and drank; who really was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, who really was crucified and died, while those in heaven and on earth and under the earth looked on; who, moreover, really was raised from the dead, when his Father raised him up. (Ign. *Trall.* 9.1-2)

In terms of his descent Jesus is declared to be of the family of David, his birth is a physical and human reality with his mother named as Mary, his human existence is further emphasized by describing his need for sustenance in the form of food and drink, his suffering and death under Pilate are recalled, and there is an expression of faith in describing the resurrection of Christ. These events presuppose a narrative of the life of Jesus that was in circulation among early Christian communities. However, the recollection of these events serves Ignatius’ theological purpose. Hence as Schoedel note, Ignatius ‘presents us with a list of moments in the ministry of Jesus that works to flatten out such opposition ... [and] is designed to answer docetism.’²³

Here Ignatius sees no need to describe the events to which he alludes in any detail. The specific details that stand behind the truncated descriptions are assumed to be sufficiently well known to make fuller explanation unnecessary. Consequently, a larger narrative of the life of Jesus appears to stand behind the creed-like statement in *Trallians*, but the precise details are not recoverable.

3.4 *The Letter of Ignatius to the Romans*

Not only does the *Letter to the Romans* have a different textual history in comparison to the six other letters of the middle recension, it is also different in character.

²¹ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 140.

²² In this context, Schoedel is less convinced of the presence of eucharistic imagery. He states ‘it should be clear that flesh and blood are basically Eucharistic terms (cf. *Phd.* 4). But more often than not they appear together in Ignatius in non-eucharistic contexts.’ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 149.

²³ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 152-153.

Principally the difference arises because in distinction to the other pieces of correspondence Ignatius has not visited or received specific information concerning the community to which he writes. For this reason, *Romans* is the least pointed or polemical of Ignatius' letters, and the key concern expressed is that believers in Rome should not attempt to intervene to prevent his impending martyrdom (Ign. *Rom.* 1.1-3.3).²⁴ There is little material in this letter that communicates anything of the story of Jesus. It is difficult to tell whether that is because the lack of a polemical background did not necessitate credal statements presenting key moments from the life of Christ, or whether the lack of reference to events from Jesus' life is purely coincidental.

In the opening greeting, Ignatius refers to the Father and 'his only son Jesus Christ' (Ign. *Rom.* salut.). The Greek expression Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ μόνου υἱοῦ has some resemblance to the Byzantine text of Jn 1.18, ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός (as well as to the text of Jn 3.16, 18). However, since the existence of that variant at the beginning of the second century is uncertain it is probably best not to see any link with the fourth gospel at this point.²⁵ Another expression that has a Johannine air is Ignatius' statement that 'our God Jesus Christ is more visible now that he is in the Father' (Ign. *Rom.* 3.3). While referring to 'our God Jesus Christ' provides a stronger statement of the divinity of Christ than anything found in the fourth gospel, the statement that Jesus 'is in the Father' resonates various Johannine texts. These include the words of the Johannine Jesus that 'in that day you shall know that I am in my Father' (Jn 14.20), and also that statement, 'I am leaving the world and going to the Father' (Jn 16.28). Despite these conceptual echoes, because of the brief nature of Ignatius' phrase and the lack of overlapping terminology it is difficult to assert that any specific gospel text is being evoked.

Ignatius also refers to Christ as 'the seed of David' (Ign. *Rom.* 7.3). Reference to Christ's Davidic descent occurs multiple times in the writings of Ignatius, alternating between references to 'David's seed' (*Eph.* 18.2; *Rom.* 7.3) and his race (*Eph.* 20.2; *Tr.* 9.1; *Sm.* 1.1).²⁶ The tradition of Jesus' Davidic pedigree plays a prominent role in Matthew's opening statement, 'son of David' (Matt 1.1). However, the statement here is most closely paralleled not by gospel material, but by two Pauline texts: one from Romans and the other from 2 Timothy.

τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα,
who came from the seed of David according to flesh (Rom 1.3)

Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ... ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ
Jesus Christ ... from the seed of David (2 Tim 2.8)

Ignatius, however, may not be drawing directly on Pauline material, but in this context reproducing perspectives already embedded in the quasi-credal material that he uses on multiple occasions in his letters.²⁷

Ignatius also describes Jesus as 'the unerring mouth by whom the Father has truly spoken' (Ign. *Rom.* 8.2). This expression has slight resonance with the Johannine statement that 'the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak' (Jn 12.49). The case for a direct relationship between these

²⁴ Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 59.

²⁵ In assessing the superiority of the reading μονογενὴς θεός (Jn 1.18), Metzger notes that 'with the acquisition of □⁶⁶ and □⁷⁵, both of which read θεός, the external support of this reading has been notably strengthened.' B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 169.

²⁶ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 96-97.

²⁷ Inge classified the parallel to Rom 1.3 as category c (as he did Paul's letter to the Romans as a whole), which represents a text for which the likely use is described as 'a lower degree of probability.' W.R. Inge, 'Ignatius', in *The New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905) 70.

traditions is not strong. However, what this range of conceptually related traditions illustrates is that Christians inhabited a common linguistic community, and they used the same register of sociolect to express key belief commitments. In Ignatius' *Letter to the Romans* one finds very little obvious recollection of the Jesus story, but fleeting expressions pertaining to Jesus are put forward in ways that his readers would recognize as 'insider' language, with some expressions perhaps finding their ultimate origin in the way elements of the story of Jesus were told and circulated in communities of early believers in Jesus.

3.5 *The Letter of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*

The results for determining the story of Jesus known by Ignatius that can be derived from his *Letter to the Philadelphians* are meagre. There are a number of generalised references to the passion and resurrection. In the greeting he commends the Philadelphians for their steadfast conviction in the suffering and resurrection of the Lord, and then greets them 'in the blood of Jesus Christ' (Ign. *Phld.* Salut.). This, as is the case in other letters, reveals that Ignatius was aware of the story of Christ's passion and resurrection, although no specific details are detectable in this opening statement. Schoedel suggests that '[t]he special mention of the "blood" of Christ suggests that he again has in mind the dangers of Docetism.'²⁸ If that is correct, then here again Ignatius recalls an event from the life of Jesus not for its own sake or simply to retell the story of his life, but to make what sees to be a pressing doctrinal point.

A similar sequence of events is described towards the end of the letter, but with the striking inclusion of a reference to the *parousia* of Christ. In this statement Ignatius also refers to these elements being 'possessed' by the gospel. Whether he has in mind a written or perhaps more likely the oral proclamation of good news is difficult to determine, but perhaps a reference to 'gospel' as a written account during the first half of the second century would be too early to be the intended sense in the writings of Ignatius.²⁹ He states, 'the gospel possesses something distinctive, namely the coming of our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, his suffering, and the resurrection' (Ign. *Phld.* 9.2). Given the apparent temporal sequencing of these events, commentators tend to take the *parousia*, 'coming' language as a reference to the first coming of Christ. As Lightfoot argues, '[t]he reference is obviously to the first advent, the incarnation, though the word, when not specially defined, generally refers to the second advent. The word does not occur in this sense in the N.T., except possibly in 2 Pet. i.16.'³⁰ Therefore, Ignatius' use of *parousia* goes beyond typical NT understanding of the term and is not dependent on any specific Pauline or gospel passage referring to the coming of Christ.

In *Philadelphians* Ignatius also presents a general reference to the eucharist, 'there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup' (Ign. *Phld.* 4.1). Here there is no specific link to the accounts of the last supper in the gospels, or to the form of the tradition in the Pauline writings (1 Cor 11.23-26). Similarly the generalised reference to the 'teachings of Christ' (Ign. *Phld.* 8.2) may reflect Ignatius' wider knowledge of teaching being part of the ministry of Jesus. However, the non-specific nature of the injunction to do everything in accordance with Christ's teachings does not allow for any firm conclusions to be drawn concerning any aspect of the Jesus

²⁸ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 195.

²⁹ For a general discussion of the use of 'gospel' terminology see G.N. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).

³⁰ Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 2, 275.

story that might have been in Ignatius' thinking at this point. It is also unlikely that the reference to 'the door of the Father' (Ign. *Phld.* 9.1) in the context of discussing the role of the high priest is reflective of the 'door' language that the Jesus of the fourth gospel uses to describe himself (Jn 10.7, 9).

Therefore, in *Philadelphians* Ignatius does not make much use of the story of Jesus. There are generalised references to the teachings, sufferings, and blood of Jesus, but those are not linked with specific narrative details related to the life of Christ. Similarly, the eucharistic references are as likely to refer to contemporary praxis within the communities to which Ignatius writes, as they are to bear an intentional reference to the gospel narratives. Thus, there is extremely little of the account of Jesus' life that is visible in the *Letter to the Philadelphians*.

3.6 The Letter of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans

The *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* provides what is perhaps the strongest demonstrable link with a specific form of the Jesus story. This occurs in another of the quasi-credal statements employed by Ignatius.

He is truly of the family of David with respect to human descent, Son of God with respect to the divine will and power, truly born of a virgin, baptized by John in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him, truly nailed in the flesh for us under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch (Ign. *Smyr.* 1.1-2)

Amidst this sequence of events from the life of Jesus, Ignatius mentions Jesus as undergoing baptism at the hands of John 'in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him' (Ign. *Smyr.* 1.1). While accounts of Jesus' baptism are to be found in all three synoptic gospels, it is only in Matthew's Gospel when John attempts to hinder Jesus from undergoing baptism that Jesus responds with the instruction to John 'permit it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness' (Matt 3.15). Ignatius demonstrates knowledge of this Matthean redactional detail.

Ign. *Smyr.* 1.1

βεβαπτισμένον ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου
ἵνα πληρωθῇ πᾶσα δικαιοσύνη ὑπ' αὐτοῦ

Matt 3.15

ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν πρὸς
αὐτόν· ἄφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον
ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν
δικαιοσύνην.
τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν.

Helmut Köster established the principal that a later writer's unique dependence on one of the synoptic authors can be established when unique redactional material can be isolated. He states, 'so hängt die Frage der Benutzung davon ab, ob sich in den angeführten Stücken Redaktionsarbeit eines Evangelisten findet.'³¹ While Köster himself came to the conclusion that Ignatius did not depend on Matthew for this redactional detail, but it came to him as a free-floating piece of tradition – that conclusion appears decidedly unlikely. The case for Ignatius' knowledge of Matthew is strengthened when considering his use of unique Matthean material in his letter to Polycarp. Within the context of double tradition material in the mission discourse, to the dominical saying 'behold I send you as sheep/lambs in the midst of wolves' (Matt 10.16a//Lk 10.3), Matthew, in contrast to Luke, adds the continuation 'therefore be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves' (Matt 10.16b).³² This redactional saying parallels material in Ignatius' letter to Polycarp.

³¹ H. Köster, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den Apostolischen Vätern*, TU 65 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957) 3.

³² Bultmann concludes that Matt 10.16b is 'a proverb that has been introduced into the instructional material.' R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (London: Blackwell, 1963) 103. Schulz

Ign. *Poly.* 2.2a
φρόνιμος γίνου ὡς ὁ ὄφις ἐν ἅπασιν
καὶ ἀκέραιος εἰς αἰὶ ὡς ἡ περιστερὰ

Matt 10.16b
γίνεσθε οὖν φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις
καὶ ἀκέραιοι ὡς αἱ περιστερὰί.

Here there is close verbal similarity over a significant portion of text, involving a saying unique among the synoptic gospels to Matthew.³³ Ignatius, however, does not attribute this saying to Jesus. Notwithstanding the lack of dominical attribution, the tradition is highly suggestive of Ignatius' direct use of material drawn from Matthew's Gospel. This in turn makes it highly likely that Ignatius' comment that Jesus was baptized by John 'in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him' (Ign. *Smyr.* 1.1), is not only taken from gospel tradition but is specifically derived from the redactional addition in Matt 3.15. In the wider credal statement, the other detail that that occurs only here in the middle recension of Ignatius of letters is that the crucifixion occurred during the time of Herod the tetrarch.³⁴

The resurrection is also referenced in the comment 'he truly raised himself' (Ign. *Smyr.* 2.1). The description of Jesus as the active agent in his own resurrection does not draw upon NT language, where in distinction God is the one who raises Jesus from the dead.³⁵ Ignatius also mentions events that involve the post-resurrection Jesus:

He came to Peter and those who were with him, and said to them, 'Take hold of me, handle me, and see that I am not a disembodied demon.' And immediately they touched Him and believed, being closely united with his flesh and blood. For this reason they too despised death; indeed they proved to be greater than death. And after his resurrection he ate and drank with them like one composed of flesh, although spiritually he was united with the Father' (Ign. *Smyr.* 3.2-3).

This is the fullest account of the post resurrection scene in the writings of Ignatius, and in this context there is a possibility that traditions from both the gospels of Luke and John may be in the background. The Lukan Jesus instructs his disciples 'touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones' (Lk 24.39). The thought expressed by Ignatius is similar, but the verbal correspondence is not particularly close. There is also some similarity with the instruction to Thomas in the fourth gospel to touch Jesus (Jn 20.27), and it is in John's account that the risen Jesus prepares a meal for his disciples, although it is never stated that Jesus himself actually eats (Jn 21.9-13). Schoedel's assessment appears correct when he notes, 'Ignatius' is probably not simply presenting a loose version of the Lukan text since further evidence for dependence on Luke is virtually absent in Ignatius.'³⁶

Therefore, Ignatius' *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* is particularly important for providing insight into certain aspects of the Jesus story known to Ignatius and the source for some of his traditions. The way in which Ignatius reproduces the redactional comment that Jesus was baptised to 'fulfil all righteousness' suggests that he had direct knowledge of Matthew's gospel. That conclusion is also reinforced by

comes to the same conclusion: 'Mt 10,16b hat bei Lk keine Entsprechung, wird also in Q nicht enthalten gewesen sein.' S. Schulz, *Q: Die Spruchquelle der Evangelisten* (Zürich: TVZ, 1972), 405.

³³ There is a parallel form of this saying found in the *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 39, and for a Greek form see P.Oxy. 655, lines 47-49. However, without entering into the debate at this point, it appears that the *Gospel of Thomas* is itself dependent on the synoptic gospels and is not a source for Ignatius or evidence of a free floating form of the saying. See the wider arguments of S.J. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*, SNTSMS 151 (Cambridge: CUP, 2012); and M. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Making of an Apocryphal Text* London: SPCK, 2012) 39, 44 n.58.

³⁴ In the long recension in the credal statement in *Magnesians* a reference to 'Herod the king' is added, (Ign *Mag.* 11.1, long recension).

³⁵ Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 2, 293, n.6.

³⁶ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 226.

Ignatius' use of the uniquely Matthean serpent and doves saying (Matt 10.16b). Ignatius also is aware of a story of Jesus that contains post-resurrection stories. Here, however, the wording diverges from the canonical accounts in significant ways, so that it is not possible to determine the source of his information. Jerome identified the terminology 'bodiless demon' as being derived from the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* (see *De vir. ill.* 16), but it is difficult to verify that claim. However, in the context of *Smyrnaeans* it is possible to trace the source of some of Ignatius' traditions concerning the life of Jesus.

3.7 *The Letter of Ignatius to the Polycarp*

In addressing Polycarp, Ignatius reveals his affection and somewhat paternalistic attitude towards the bishop of Smyrna.³⁷ However, there is very little recourse to Jesus tradition in this letter, which is the only one in the corpus of the middle recension addressed to an individual. Reference has already been made to the serpents and doves saying (Ign. *Poly.* 2.2a). Here there is little doubt that the tradition is derived from Matthew's Gospel (Matt 10.16b). Yet, Ignatius does not attribute this saying to Jesus, and cites it as though it were an independent maxim. The instruction he gives to Polycarp to command brothers 'to love their wives as the Lord loves the church' (Ign. *Poly.* 5.1) appears to derive from Eph 5.25, and thus reflects Pauline rather than Jesus tradition. Moreover, the farewell in the name of 'our God Jesus Christ' is a reflection of Ignatius' christology where Jesus can unambiguously be identified as divine. This is not derived from gospel tradition.

It is instructive to consider the cases of the letters to the *Smyrnaeans* and *Polycarp* side by side. These are pieces of correspondence written to the same location. In the first Ignatius perhaps reveals more of his indebtedness to the Jesus story than any other of his letters. By contrast, in writing to Polycarp, Ignatius shows little use of the Jesus tradition. This illustrates the fact that early Christian authors do not reveal the full range of knowledge they possess about Jesus on every occasion they write. The topics that Ignatius addresses when writing to Polycarp do not require him to make use of the Jesus story.

4. *Conclusion*

If any result is certain, it is that Ignatius knew more of the Jesus story than he reveals in his seven surviving letters. The epistolary genre and the issues he was addressing were not the natural vehicles by which to provide an extensive recounting of the life of Jesus. Notwithstanding this, it is instructive to consider how much of the Jesus story is contained in these occasional writings, with the richest source being the five quasi-credal statements found in four of the letters (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2; 18.2; Ign. *Mag.* 11.1; Ign. *Trall.* 9.1-2; Ign. *Smyr.* 1.1-2). The outline of the Jesus story that he presents in these statements is that Jesus was considered to be a descendant of David, he was born of the virgin Mary, he was baptized by John, he suffered and was crucified in the time of Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, and that was raised from the dead. In addition to the information derived from these credal statements. He also provides some fleeting recollections of other gospel traditions, such as Jesus being anointed on his head (Ign. *Eph.* 17.1). In this case it was argued that Ignatius is likely

³⁷ For a fuller discussion of the portray of Polycarp in Ignatius' writings see P. Foster, 'Polycarp in the Writings of Ignatius', in D.M. Gurtner, J. Hernández, and P. Foster (eds), *Studies on the Text of the New Testament and Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Michael W. Holmes* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 411-431.

drawing on the Matthean rather than the Markan form of the tradition, based on his demonstrable use of Matthew at other points.³⁸

In addition, Ignatius repeatedly refers to the resurrection of Jesus (Ign. *Eph.* 20.1; Ign. *Mag.* 11.1; Ign. *Phld.* 1.1; 8.2; 9.2; Ign. *Smyr.* 1.2; 3.1, 3; 5.3; 7.2; 12.2). Apart from simply mentioning the term 'resurrection', Ignatius also provides a brief account of post-resurrection events (Ign. *Smyr.* 3.2-3). However the account he provides of certain post-resurrection events has little correspondence with parallel traditions in the canonical gospels. It is impossible to know whether Ignatius had another no-longer extant tradition for the post-resurrection events he described, or whether the difference from the canonical accounts was simply due to faulty memory and the lack of opportunity to consult written sources.

Fundamentally, Ignatius draws upon the Jesus story to make his key theological points, typically to assert the full humanity of Christ demonstrated through the reality of his birth, suffering, and death. Ignatius recourse to the Jesus story is selective, and reflects those traditions that can be pressed into the service of his immediate arguments. It appears highly likely that Ignatius knew elements of the Jesus story from Matthew's gospel. It is possible that he may have known Matthew's Gospel in its entirety, but the evidence that can be extracted from his epistles means such a conclusion cannot be asserted with certainty. What Ignatius' writings do demonstrate is his unwavering commitment to Jesus, the founder of the religious movement of which Ignatius became a local leader in Antioch. His writings, composed during a time of chained transportation, reveal that the Jesus story was still central to his religious self-understanding. Through drawing on the story of Jesus, and presenting him as one who truly suffered, was crucified, and underwent resurrection, Ignatius is able to find solace that his impending death is not in vain, but is indeed his ultimate expression and genuine act of discipleship, 'now I begin to be a disciple ... that I should attain to Jesus Christ' (Ign. *Rom.* 5.3).³⁹ Thus for Ignatius of Antioch, although he does not provide a great range of details concerning the life of Jesus, it is the case that in the story of the Christ he finds the basis for his theological convictions, the driving force behind his faith commitments, and the example and hope that undergirds his willingness to undergo martyrdom in Rome as a disciple of Jesus.

³⁸ For an extensive argument for Ignatius' knowledge of Matthew see P. Foster, 'The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch and the Writings that later formed the New Testament', in A.F. Gregory and C.M. Tuckett (eds.), *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*; vol. 1 of *The New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: OUP, 2005) 159-186.

³⁹ Schoedel see this statement as the most extreme example of Ignatius' willing to undergo suffering. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 180. However, for Ignatius, it was an expression of the totality of his commitment to Christ, and his willingness to more fully become his disciple by being conformed to the likeness of the sufferings of Christ.